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SUBJECT: VCJCS GIAMBASTIANI PRAISES SLOVENIAN CONTRIBUTIONS
TO INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

¶1. (U) SUMMARY. Defense Minister Erjavec, Chief of Defense Gutman, and Deputy Chief of Defense Steiner were pleased to show off the Slovenian Armed Forces' (SAF) progress in defense transformation and its significant contributions to international security during a visit March 30 and 31 by Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Giambastiani. The brief courtesy call served as a progress report from the Slovenes about their efforts, and Giambastiani's positive comments were widely reported in the press and appreciated by the Slovenes. Discussion focused on recent hot topics for Slovenia, including caveats, defense spending, air policing, and U.S. assistance with education and training. SAF leadership also affirmed their long term strategic focus on the western Balkans. This visit was important to maintaining an already strong bilateral military relationship with this NATO ally and presented a good opportunity to encourage the SAF to continue its comprehensive transformation and maintain its already high international engagement. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) In his meeting with Minister of Defense Karl Erjavec and Chief of Defense Albin Gutman, Admiral Giambastiani thanked them for Slovenia's international contributions, particularly the recent increase in forces to KFOR. He noted that Slovenia's efforts to deploy abroad -- currently 11% of their forces are deployed in support of international missions -- and the decision to remove major caveats on troops in Kosovo had been noticed in Washington. Erjavec told Giambastiani that Slovenia is working hard to reform, transform and recruit forces while at the same time supporting efforts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, and particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, while also preparing to be part of an EU Battlegroup this year. He called it a "great amount of work for a young and small army." Gutman was self-assured and proudly noted that "we started from nothing to build the SAF, and we've done quite well," adding that the SAF has "no problem not being a large force" and that the deployment to KFOR has "eliminated doubts about (the SAF's) abilities."

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POL-MIL HOT POTATOES: SPENDING, CAVEATS, AIR POLICING
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¶3. (SBU) On two long-standing pol-mil issues -- Slovenia's commitment to bring defense spending to 2 percent of GDP and its plans to eliminate caveats on troops deployed abroad -- Erjavec repeated past statements. He and Gutman both said that Slovenia would spend 1.87 percent of GDP in 2008 and would meet the 2 percent spending target by 2009. Erjavec

repeated that the MoD's ability to keep up with substantial economic growth (5 percent in 2007 and 4 percent expected from 2008 to 2010) is a challenge, as is selling the argument for more spending to parliament. Erjavec called caveats on Slovenian troops in Afghanistan a "difficult political situation" but said again that he is working to reduce caveats despite questions from parliament. Gutman, who has also told EmbOffs that he advocates the removal of caveats, was upbeat about the GOS decision to deploy to KFOR with fewer restrictions, noting that Slovenian soldiers are now authorized to conduct riot control and deal with demonstrations, which will be a key challenge given the current potential for instability in the region as plans for Kosovo are finalized.

14. (SBU) On the perennial issue of air policing, Erjavec commented that purchasing aircraft will be too expensive for the SAF in the short-term, but possible in the long term - five to ten years out. Because of this, he said Slovenia must look at other options, including cooperation between Slovenia and the U.S. Erjavec called one idea introduced by Slovenian Ambassador in Washington Samo Zbogar -- mixed U.S.-Slovenian teams for air policing -- a "good idea" and commented that it would be good to explore the possibility for Slovenes to get pilot training from the U.S.

15. (SBU) Gutman also mentioned the SAF's recent difficulties with recruitment, saying that the small size of the country and the aggressive economic growth meant that people are looking elsewhere for employment. He said that the MOD and SAF are working to increase pay for soldiers through a new military reform law but that he was still concerned about the issue over the long term.

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FUTURE INTERNATIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS
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16. (SBU) Erjavec mentioned Slovenia's planned increase in troops in Afghanistan -- from 54 to 66 in August -- and Slovenia's fall 2006 contribution of 2000 weapons and 2 million rounds of ammunition to the Afghanistan National Army. He said the SAF does not have additional equipment on hand to contribute and commented that it has been very difficult to increase number of forces in Afghanistan while also deploying a battalion to Kosovo.

17. (SBU) Erjavec, Gutman, and Steiner all reiterated that Slovenia's number one priority is the Balkans, specifically Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia, saying the situation in these countries is very important for regional stability and security. They noted an opportunity for Slovenia to have a special role in the region given links in language, culture, and history and said that they are working on initiatives for defense reform in these countries. Gutman noted that defense cooperation was good in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia, but that border disputes have impeded cooperation with Croatia. He was optimistic that soon-to-be signed defense cooperation agreements with Serbia would improve mil-to-mil relations and allow for the easier movement of Slovenian troops serving in the region (Note: equipment for the SAF battalion deployed in Kosovo was shipped via boat to Greece instead of the more straightforward train route to avoid traveling through Serbia.) Erjavec said that he foresees NATO enlargement for Bosnia, Serbia and Macedonia in the future, saying that the Euro-Atlantic Alliance is a key to stability in the region.

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U.S.-SLOVENIA BILATERAL RELATIONS
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18. (SBU) Gutman called the U.S. Slovenia's "most important strategic partner" and praised bilateral cooperation between the two militaries over the past fourteen years. As has been typical during meetings over the past year, Gutman has shown particular interest in education and training opportunities

between the U.S. and Slovenian militaries, lauding Slovenia's long-standing partnership with the Colorado National Guard, mil-to-mil events, training and education opportunities for Slovenes in U.S. schools, and the potential for Slovenes to attend U.S. military academies and receive pilot training. Gutman and Steiner also mentioned frustration that for the first time in recent memory Slovenia did not receive a slot at the National Defense University (NDU), the Army War College, or the Army Command and General Staff College. Steiner, an NDU alumni, made note of how well the SAF has utilized slots in these schools over the past years, noting that Slovenian graduates of the U.S. schools are currently serving in high level positions throughout the SAF and the Slovenian government. Slovenian U.S. school graduates are also leading Slovenian contingents abroad. For example, an alumni of the Command and General Staff College is leading the battalion currently in Kosovo. (NOTE: On April 6, Embassy Ljubljana's Office of Defense Cooperation was notified that a slot has opened up for the Slovenes in the National Defense University's Industrial College of the Armed Forces. Steiner was extremely pleased with the news. END NOTE.)

19. (SBU) COMMENT. Giambastiani's visit was billed as a quick courtesy call but his efforts to thank Slovenia for "punching above its weight" were widely and positively reported in the press and very much appreciated by Slovenian colleagues. In defense transformation and international contributions, Slovenia has a positive story to tell (and does not hesitate to note that USG support, especially via mil-to-mil events and training, has been vital to its success.) The SAF has made great strides over the past few years. While Slovenian contributions are not tremendous in terms of sheer numbers, the per capita international contributions from this small ally leads the pack at NATO. Slovenia can be expected to continue its strategic focus on security in the western Balkans, with smaller strategic deployments elsewhere when possible. END COMMENT.
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